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ABSTRACT

Although family integration is a much-used concept in sociological research on the family, there has been no consistency in its definition or measurement. Numerous factors representing family integration have been combined to develop a measure, the Family Integration Index, designed to be a more valid and reliable measure of the multi-dimensional concept than currently exists. Family integration is a multi-dimensional concept which has three stable dimensions representing three functions of the family (cohesion, expressive functions and instrumental functions). Arguments made for a measure which does not include items directly tapping relationships with father or mother results in an index which can be unambiguously administered to individuals from nuclear families of various configurations. (Author)

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Family Integration:

A Multi-Dimensional Concept

by

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and

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INTRODUCTION

In the past there have been a number of empirical studies in family sociology which have made use of the concept of family integration. There have been studies attempting to determine the relationship between family size and integration (Nye et al., 1970; Templeton, 1962) as well as numerous studies exploring the effects of family integration. These include its effects on achievement values (Malec et al., 1969), on dating behavior (Eslinger et al., 1972), on autonomy of adolescents (Sundberg et al., 1969), on the socialization process (Bell and Vogel, 1968), and on adjustment to crisis (Hill, 1958). Nonetheless, there is considerable ambiguity about the concept itself. It has been suggested, for example, that the oncept of family integration should only be used to apply to the relationships between members of a nuclear family and not to the extended kin (Rogers and Sebald, 1962). The reason for this limitation has been adequately demonstrated by Rogers and Sebald who illustrate that there are indeed two different concepts which apply to the nuclear and extended families. They conclude their report by demonstrating how the concept of familism can and should be broken down into the concepts of family integration and kinship orientation applying to the nuclear and extended families respectively. More recent research on family integration has primarily applied to the nuclear family while kinship orientation or familism is the concept used to describe the similar phenomenon for the extended family (Heller, 1976). In this paper, references to family integration are intended to apply only to the nuclear family.

Other points of ambiguity revolve around what family integration

actually means and what characteristics denote an integrated family. The empirical studies surveyed vary considerably in what they define as factors making up an integrated family. The purpose of this research is to attempt to clarify this second type of ambiguity, by developing a comprehensive measure of family integration which can be applied to nuclear families of various types and will be generally useable with diverse types of samples.

As a starting point for our conceptualization, we define group integration as the degree to which the behavior of group members is group-oriented rather than self-oriented, and tends to build harmony and reduce conflict among groups members (Hamblin, 1958). Using this definition, a general definition of family integration would be the degree to which family members are family-oriented as opposed to self-oriented and the degree to which their behavior tends to build harmony and reduce conflict within the family, as well as satisfying the individual needs of family members.

Family integration has also been defined in other ways in sociological research. The concept is said to include the subordination of individual aspirations to family goals and cooperation (Sebald and Andrews, 1962; Hill, 1949; Jansen, 1952). In an integrated family the members accept rules, beliefs and ideals of the family (Jansen, 1952; Sebald and Andrews, 1962) and they are interdependent in their need for affection and closeness (Sebald and Andrews, 1962; Hill, 1949; Bachman, 1971). Members of an integrated family also tend to have common interests (Angell, 1936; Jansen, 1952) and a minimum of social distance

between each other. A sense of unity also characterizes an integrated family (Angell, 1936). Other research has shown that in an integrated family the members participate in joint activities (Hill, 1949), that there is pride in the family and a sense of solidarity. Egalitarianism and the sharing of decision-making have also been found to be a characteristic of an integrated family (Bachman, 1971; Jansen, 1952). Family integration has further been defined as the ability to deal with common problems (Malec et al., 1969). An integrated family also functions smoothly as a unit (Bossard and Boll, 1960).

The studies cited, as well as others, typically give a general definition of family integration and then list several componenets of which it consists. The factors or components as listed above have all been related to family integration at one time or another in empirical studies, but we have not found any one study which includes all of them. These empirical studies also represent a number of sets of questionnaire items all of which reportedly measure the same concept --family integration. Some studies do use similar questions and a few repeat the same items used by another researcher. But nowhere is there a study that taps all the components reportedly making up family integration. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to provide such a comprehensive analysis of the concept of family integration. We have taken questions from a number of studies of family integration and administered them all to the same sample. In this way it is possible to examine the underlying dimensions of family integration and develop a measure using only a few items which will represent each dimension of the concept.

DATA COLLECTION AND DESIGN

The questionnaire items used in this analysis come from seven separate sources. There were a total of 50 items used in approximately their original form. The response categories used were also those from the sources where they were found. Ten items were taken from a study which attempted to relate family integration to achievement values, academic self-concept and dropping out of high school which was reported in 1969 (Malec, Williams and Dager). These items were used exactly as they were found. Eleven items representing closeness to father and mother and reasoning with son were taken from Bachman's (1971) composite measure of family relations. A twelfth item was added so that there would be four comparable items for each parent and four on both parents. It was possible to obtain and include only three items from Jansen's (1952) study of family solidarity. Hill's family integration scale, which contains eights items was used. Slight modifications were necessary on these items to make the item format comparable to the other questionnaire items. Two items were included from Itkin's 1952 study of attitudes toward parents. Ten of the 21 items from the Rundquist and Sletto (1936) Family Scale were included. Those which were included dealt with nuclear family integration whereas the eleven which were omitted dealt more with familism. The six other items which were included came from unpublished research on family integration done at the University of Maryland. All six of these dealt with the child's relationship with his parents.

These 50 items were administered to 714 undergraduate students who

were enrolled in various Sociology courses at a large eastern state universtiy and a small community college during the summer and fall sessions of 1975. Also included were a number of demographic questions such as age, sex, parents' marital status, and ordinal position.

The data analysis was designed to accomplish two objectives. The first was to examine the underlying structure of the items and to determine the stability of that structure. Factor analytic techniques were used for this purpose, with the expectation that the resulting factors would correspond to the theoretical characteristics which previous researchers have said compose family integration. These results will be discussed at a later point in the paper.

The second related but more important objective of the data analysis was to reduce the number of items so that they could be more reasonably adminstered in later research as a measure of family integration. This reduction in number however, was also designed to result in a set of items which would more accurately reflect family integration than has been done up to this point. There were several criteria for eliminating items from the original fifty. The criteria were based on: 1) the results of the factor analysis; 2) the content of the items; 3) the distribution of responses to the items; and 4) the correlation of each item with the sum of the other items. The results of applying each of these criteria will be discussed in turn.

As a check on the conclusions reached in the above analysis and the reasoning used for the elimination of some of the items, additional data were collected during the Fall of 1976 from another 243 students from the

same large university. The purpose was to validate some of the reasoning behind the selection of the final items for the measure of family integration. The results of this additional analysis will follow as well.

THE DATA ANALYSIS

Before discussing the results of the various data analyses, a description of the sample used is provided. The sample consisted of students enrolled in Sociology courses at a large state university and a small community college in 1975. The majority of these were from the university. Using the limited amount of demographic information that was collected, the sample can be described as follows. The sample was 55.6% female and averaged 20 years of age. Thirty-five percent were the first child in their family, 30% were the second; 20% were third and the remaining 15% were somewhere between the fourth and ninth child in the family. Since the marital status of parents is often considered a factor affecting family integration, data on this variable were collected. Eighty percent of the sample had parents who were married; 11% were separated or divorced and 9% had one or the other parent who was deceased. Although this sample was not selected randomly, it does not seem to be unusual with regard to these four variables.

To examine the underlying structure of these 50 items, all of which have been used as indicators of family integration, a Principal Factor type of factor analysis was used and resulted in nine reliable factors. As is commonly done, this first factor analysis was done with an eigenvalue of 1.0 as the minimum for a reliable factor. The ten items

which loaded on the first factor were all the items referring to the father (or male guardian). These items referred to the respondent's relationship with the father, the father's relationship with the children in the family, as well as with his relationship with the mother. Items dealing with the respondent's desire to change the father or to be like the father were also among those loading on this first factor. The fact that the items referring to the father load together as the most reliable factor (eigenvalue = 15.8) can be seen as consistent with the Landis (1962) finding that closeness to father was a better indicator of family integration than was closeness to mother. Our finding is consistent with that of Landis if by 'better' he meant more reliable.

The items which loaded on the second factor (eigenvalue = 4.2) were items referring to the mother (or female guardian). The content of these items was parallel to that in the father items. All but one of the nine mother items loaded on this factor--the ninth loaded on the eighth factor (eigenvalue = 1.05) with one other item which had to do with family activities. This mother item had to do with activities as well (how often respondent and mother did things together).

The third factor (eigenvalue = 1.7) can be seen as a cohesiveness factor. The nine items which loaded on this factor dealt with content relative to trust; cooperation; helpfulness; support; caring; interest and closeness of siblings. The fourth factor, on the other hand contained items related to decision-making, family discussions and mutual understanding. These seven items formed a factor with an eigenvalue of 1.6.

Seven items dealing with happiness and contentment with the home situation formed the fifth factor (eigenvalue = 1.4). Only two items loaded on the sixth factor which had an eigenvalue of 1.3. These items had to do with pride in ones family tree and subordinating ones own desires for family goals. Both of these items had rather low estimates of communality; .341 and .306 respectively.

The seventh factor (eigenvalue = 1.2) was composed of four items all related to the fairness of the parents in dealing with the children. Two of the four had low estimates of communality (.321 and .342). The eighth factor was an activity factor with only two items loading on it. Finally, only one item loaded on the ninth factor (eigenvalue = 1.0). This was the item referring to the celebration of holidays nad birthdays as a family and it had a very low estimate of communality (.236). The results of this first factor analysis are summarized in Table I below.

Table I about here

It can be seen from this table that 41 of the fifty items loaded on the first five factors. The average estimate of communality for the items is approximately equal to or above the usual acceptable level of .500 only for the first five factors. These findings coupled with the fact that the content of the items loading after the fifth factor are less easily combined as distinguishable dimensions, lead us to limit the examination of the stability of the factors to the items which loaded on the first five factors.

Stability of Dimensions

In an effort to determine the stability of the structure implied by the factor analysis, a number of additional analyses were carried out. The reason for these additional analyses was to assess whether the same factor structure would result under different conditions. For this purpose the sample was divided into various subgroups and the factor analysis was repeated for each. The stability of the factor structure was to be judged by the similarity of the results for the various subgroups. It was expected that if the five factors from the first analysis were valid, reliable dimensions of family integration, then dividing the sample into these subgroups should not greatly alter the resulting factor structure. The sample was divided in three different ways. These divisions included: a random split half; a division based on the sex of the respondetns; and a division based on the age of the respondents. The rationale for such random and other types of subsample replication has been provided by Finifter (1972).

Not surprisingly, the random split half analysis showed the most stability of the factor structure. With 357 cases in each of the random halves, both resulted in five factors. In both instances, the items which loaded on the five factors in the total sample factor anaysis, also tended to load together in each split half analysis. The third and fourth factors however, were reversed in the two split halves. The extent to which the factors represent the same dimensions in each random half is reflected in the resulting Tucker's Coefficients which measure the congruence of the factors (Harman, 1967). These coefficients ranged

from .81 for the cohesiveness factor to .98 for the father factor. Three of the factors resulted in measures of congruence greater than .90. These were the factors representing items dealing with each parent and with decison-making.

The second subgroup factor analysis was done by sex. With 308 males and 386 females, again five factors resulted for each group. In this analysis, the coefficients of congruence ranged from .76 to .97. The same three factors again had coefficients above .90, thus lending support to the idea that the factor structure is relatively consistent regardless of the sex of the respondent.

It is interesting to note here that the father and mother factors reversed in the female subgroup analysis. What this seems to indicate is that the most reliable factor is the factor which represents items dealing with the same sex parent. Even though the parent factors reverse in reliability in the sex subgroups, both exhibit relatively high coefficients of congruence when considered in the sex subgroups (.98 and .96 for the mother and father factors respectively).

We can further say that the resulting structure is probably not due to chance, since similar results are found in both the random split half analysis and the sex analysis. As a further check on the stability of the factor structure, the factor analysis was repeated on subgroups divided on the basis of age. The division point chosen was 22 years of age, with 23% of the sample over 22. Again, five factors resulted in both age groups. In contrast to the two previous subgroup analyses, this one resulted in only two coefficients above .90 (the two parent factors).

The cohesiveness factor had a coefficient of .88. The other two factors, however, had relatively low coefficients of congruence, .55 and .57 respectively for the decision-making and the happiness factors. What these results seem to indicate is that some of the dimensions of family integration may differ by age. It is not surprising to find that the factors which are not congruent are those one might expect to differ by age. We might expect that those respondents over 22 would respond differently that younger respondents to items on decision-making and items reflecting the family as the center of happiness. Since older respondents are likely to be more independent as far as family decisions, this dimension of family integration might not be important to them. The older respondents might also depend less on their families for happiness given their greater independence. In retrospect, then, the incongruence of these factors is not surprising. It does suggest, however, that a measure of family integration including items which measure these dimensions, might be more reliably used with younger respondents. On the other hand these items might be excluded from a measure to be used with older respondetns. The three separate subgroup factor analyses then, indicate that the first three factors are quite stable dimensions of family integration and that the other two show some instability by age.

Other Criteria

Having decided to consider for elimination the nine items which did not load on the first five factors, the 50 items were then examined on the basis of three additional criteria. Any item which did not meet all of these criteria was eliminated from consideration as an item in the

final scale.

After the factor analysis, the second criterion used was the content of the items. Comments made by the respondents, indicated that six items had content problems such as unclear or ambiguous wording in the items or in the response categories provided. Also three of these six items were overly skewed (more than 75% in the positive direction). The distribution of responses was the third criterion for elimination of items from the measure. This was done by determining the percent of the responses that were in the positive direction for each item. These percentages were found to vary from 21 to 89%. It was subsequently decided that any item for which 75% or more of the responses were in the positive direction would be considered overly skewed and subject to elimination. The reasoning behind this decision was that highly skewed items were probably subject to the social desireability response bias and were not likely to discriminate between respondents form integrated and non-integrated families. The responses to these items also lack variance which tends to make them poor scale items. Using the criteria of 75% positive response, we found 15 skewed items, including three of those which had content problems and four which did not load on the first five factors.

As the fourth criterion for elimination, the correlation of each item with the sum of the other items was examined. These correlations ranged from .199 for "How often do you and your mother do things together that you both enjoy?" to .74 for "How interdependent do you feel as a family, are you dependent on one another for happiness, is there a

feeling of unity?" Although all of these correlations were statistically significant ($p < .001$) it was decided that we would consider eliminating any items which did not correlate with the summed index at a level at least equal to .40. This resulted in the possible elimination of 13 items from the original fifty on this criterion alone. These included four of those which were previously determined to be skewed. After these four criteria were examined for all 50 items, any which failed to meet all the criteria were eliminated. This resulted in 24 items left to be considered for the measure.

Of these remaining 24 items, five were from the first factor, four from the second. Six of the items dealt with cohesiveness, four with decision-making and five with happiness. At this point in the analysis, still desiring a measure with fewer items and greater generalizability, it was necessary to consider other criteria for elimination of items. During the administration of the questionnaire, the respondents were instructed to make note of any items which were difficult to answer for what ever reason. As discussed earlier, ambiguity of wording was one criterion already considered. Another point of confusion arose around the items dealing with parents. Those respondents who did not have both mother and father living with them much of their lives expresesd difficulty in responding to such questions. They were instructed to leave such items unanswered. This however, resulted in a large portion of the items being unanswered by approximately 20% of this sample (those with parents divorced, separated, or deceased). To develop a measure which would not be subject to this problem, the possibility of eliminating the

nine items which specifically mentioned either parent was considered. This modification would make the measure more generalizable since it could be administered without confusion to any respondents, regardless of their parents' maritial status.

Further Analysis

To determine the feasability of using a measure without parent items and to cross-validate our earlier findings, additional data were collected. The rationale was to examine whether the parent items added any information beyond that gained by the fifteen items which remained. To do this, a questionnaire was designed to be administered to a sample of students from introductory sociology classes during the Fall semester 1976 at the university previously mentioned. This questionnaire contained the 15 items which remained after all the above criteria were examined and which were non-parent items. Some slight modifications in wording were also made at this time. The characteristics of these items can be seen in Table II.

Table II about here

All fifteen items correlated with the sum of the other items at .40 or greater. All were originally on factors 3, 4 or 5. None had more than 75% of the responses in the positive direction and the content of each did not specifically deal with either parent.

In addition to these fifteen items, the second questionnaire contained four of the parent items that were meant to measure closeness to each parent. These items plus the fifteen would be assessed relative to the 15 alone to determine if it was necessary to include items on parents

in the measure. This second sample was also used to cross-validate the earlier factor analytic results.

Cross-Validation

To determine the feasability of omitting the parent items, the fifteen family integration items combined were correlated with the 15 plus the four parent items. This resulted in a correlation of .98. This relatively high correlation, plus the difficulties created by the parent items in administering the questionnaire provides an appropriate rationale for omitting such items without much loss.

A factor analysis similar to the earlier ones was carried out on the fifteen family integration items in this second sample. Three reliable factors resulted. The first contained six items, five of which had originally loaded on the third factor and one that had been on the first factor (see Table II). These items dealt with trust, cooperation, interest in each other and closeness of the children. This factor might be seen as a cohesiveness factor. The second factor contained six items, five of which had originally loaded on the fifth factor and one from the third factor. These items dealt with happiness and contentment. The third factor was made up of two items which had originally loaded on the fourth factor reflecting interaction that deals with family decision making. These two items seem to represent freedom of communication between parents and children. There was one item which loaded equally on the second and third factors, indicating some overlap between the two.

Using the items which met our previous criteria for acceptability then, family integration appears as a multi-dimensional concept. The

dimensions can be thought of as representing several functions of the family: one instrumental, one expressive, and one dealing with openness of communication. We would also suggest that the parent dimensions of family integration overlap considerably with the others and items tapping them can be omitted to allow for an easier administration of the measure. This leaves fifteen items which can be considered to make up a reliable, comprehensive measure of family integration (The Family Integration Index) which can be applied to nuclear families of various configurations in diverse samples.

DISCUSSION

The unity of the family can be seen as a fusion of the biological, psychological, social and economic factors (Ackerman, 1938). Out of this fusion, the family develops an atomosphere in which family functions, organization, and emotional well-being are met with a minimum amount of disorganization and conflict. Over the past hundred years or so, the family has changed from one which was institutionally embedded in the larger society to one that has become "a unity which develops out of mutual affection and intimate association" between family members (Burgess and Locke, 1953). It is the latter components that the Family Integration Index (FII) is designed to measure, and while we have not tapped each of Ackerman's factors directly, the three dimensions of the FII do represent summary measures that reflect (or indirectly measure) the bonds, interaction and atmosphere that exemplify an integrated primary group.

The fifteen items in the FII can be categorized into three dimen-

sions. (1) Cohesiveness. This dimension reflects system maintenance (help and cooperation) which implies order and organization of role relationships; shared committment (closeness, trust, confiding and listening) which suggests strong bonds of affection; having confidants with whom one can share successes, anxieties and frustrations and satisfy one's needs for response.

(2) Happiness and Contentment. The items making up this dimension suggest the expressive aspect of family life wherein members feel warmth and feel secure in a stable environment. Thus, expressions of contentment, happiness, pleasantness and unity reflect feeling states based on a stable and predictable structure in which interaction takes place. Members obtain personal satisfaction from family relationships by being recognized as whole persons. In a segmentalized, urban-industrial society, the modern family is one of the few, if not the only source serving this function (Adams, 1971; Cooley, 1902).

(3) Freedom of Communication. Items in this factor (parents listen to arguments, influence decision-making, and tell each other what we think) suggest that the individual feels that he is an integral part of the unit and can contribute to that unit. Moreover, in an era when individualism and autonomy are important components of social relations and when one's identity is indivdiual rather than based on the group, the freedom to help shape one's own destiny is an important component of contemporary life.

Consistent with our initial conceptualization, the three dimensions include items reflecting processes of interaction that lead to group

harmony and stability as well as those processes that help maintain the integrity and autonomy of the individual without drastically altering the group maintenance functions. The fifteen dimensions constitute a family integration index which we consider to be a reliable, comprehensive measure that can be applied to nucelar families of various configurations in diverse samples of modern industrial societies. However, since it was constructed with adolescents and young adults, it may be most applicable for use with young people. We have not yet obtained additional data to which the FII can be related, nor have we examined the test-retest reliability of the index. It is our hope that such analyses will develop from the work provided here.

With the period of rapid change now being experienced in modern day families in the form of one parent families, mental health problems of children, frequent mobility, and deviance attributed to weak or disorganized families, a measure of this kind may be useful in perhaps ferreting out some determinants of problem behavior. It is also likely that a measure of family integration like the one developed here will prove useful in examining the relationship between family integration and such things as academic achievement, transmission of values and later marital adjustment of the children.

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Table I

Characteristics of Factors Resulting
From Principal Factor Factor Analysis

Factor	Principal Content of Items	Number of Items	Average Estimate of Communality	Eigenvalue
1	Father	10	.652	15.82
2	Mother	8	.642	4.23
3	Cohesiveness	9	.490	1.70
4	Decision-Making	7	.502	1.67
5	Happiness	7	.572	1.43
6	Family Pride	2	.324	1.31
7	Fairness	4	.450	1.16
8	Activities	2	.376	1.05
9	Celebration of Holidays	1	.236	1.00

Table II

Family Integration Index
Item Characteristics

Item Content and Response Categories	Correlation With Original Summed Index	Original Factor	Final Factor	Percent Positive Response
1. How close are the children in your family to each other?	.412	3	1	47
extremely close quite close fairly close not very close distant very distant				
2. People in my family can be trusted completely.	.455	3	1	69
strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree				
3. Do the members of your family cooperate in trying to get things done?	.692	3	1	67
perfectly very well fairly well not too well very poorly				
4. In my family, we help each other whenever we can.	.660	3	1	70
all of the time most of the time some of the time none of the time				
5. Do the members of your family like to hear about each others experiences?	.612	3	1	71
a great deal frequently sometimes seldom never				
6. I can confide in members of my family.	.653	4	1	60
always often sometimes seldom never				
7. In my family, we tell each other what our plans are.	.593	3	2	63
all of the time most of the time some of the time none of the time				
8. Is there a feeling of unity in your family?	.740	5	2	57
extreme feeling of unity more than average feeling of unity average feeling of unity below average feeling of unity little or no feeling of unity				

Table II
(Continued)

Item Content and Response Categories	Correlation With Original Summed Index	Original Factor	Final Factor	Percent Positive Response
9. My home is the most pleasant place in the world. strongly agree disagree agree strongly disagree	.723	5	2	50
10. I become nervous at home. strongly agree disagree agree strongly disagree	.581	5	2	61
11. Ours is a happy family. all of the time some of the time most of the time none of the time	.734	5	2	70
12. I feel most contented at home. strongly agree disagree agree strongly disagree	.701	5	2	62
13. In my family we tell each other what we think, no matter what it is. all of the time some of the time most of the time none of the time	.550	4	2,3	57
14. How much influence do you feel you have in family decisions that affect you? a great deal of influence considerable influence moderate influence some influence little or no influence	.525	4	3	63
15. How often do your parents listen to your side of the argument? all of the time seldom often never sometimes	.627	4	3	67